(1) Maharshi Aurobindo - faithful interpreter of Karma

Blind is destiny, declare some modern critics misinterpreting the tenets of Vedanta. But they could take their lessons at the feet of the Maharshi of Pondicheri, who though quoting proverbs like 'Thou hast sown the wind and though shalt reap the whirlwind', interprets our ancient doctrine of Karma in the right perspective. In his Problem of rebirth p119, he quotes 'What I sow in this hour, is reaped by posterity in several generations and we then call it the Karma of the family. On p127, in the same essay he refers to an interesting story which seems to have been reported in the dailies of the day: 'A Shylockian moneylender had deprived his neighbour of his entire property, even the things with which he would earn his daily bread, (perhaps his bullocks and cart). Soon after this victim was himself born as the son of the moneylender, only to suffer from an incurable malady in the latter's house. The invalid son in his delirious fever revealed all this to the neighbours who came to see him. The usurer had to spend all the money he had robbed from his erstwhile victim. When the last paise was exhausted and the accounts were squared up (as per Chitragupta's account, if we could say so, echoing Dante terminology), the son's soul was satisfied and he died!' The Maharshi continues on p166 calling this Karma doctrine a marriage of convenience between right and vital unity, virtue and desire, remarking that the law of Karma is really such a strict hard taskmaster. In a previous context in his essay on Terrestrial Law (on p149), the yogi aptly declares: 'The sun shines and the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike; the benificence and malaficence of Nature, the gracious and dreadful Mother, her beauty

and terrors, her utility and danger, are bestowed and inflicted without favour or disfavour on all her children. and the good man is no more her favourite than the sinner. Vital nature works out her ends fearlessly enough but not by any means shamelessly in the ethical sense.

The revered yogi in a different context (p40, Divine Life I Ethics of the individual) remarks similarly: the liberation of the human soul is the keynote of the divine action: it is the primordial and supreme necessity and the pivot in which all else hinges: it is the point of light at which the intended complete self luminisation in the Many begins to emerge. But the limited soul extends its perception horizontally as well as perpendicularly. Its unity with the Transcendant One is incomplete without its unity with the Cosmic Many. And that lateral unit hang-lates itself by multiplication, a reproduction of its own liberated state at other points in the Multiplicity. The divine soul reproduces itself in similar liberated souls as the actual reproduces itself in similar bodies.

This sādhaka's aspiration to reach the Lord is called integrated yoga by the revered yogi, the upward movement of human aspiration and the downward movement of the Dynamic Divine as he calls it. It's a waking union with the Divine' to use the yogi's words.

Shakespeare also remarked that our failures must direct our attention to our inward defects.

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars
But in ourselves that we are underlings

bodies. Therefore, whenever even a single soul is liberated there is a tendency to an extension and even to an outburst of the same divine Self-consciousness in other individual souls of our terrestrial humanity, perhaps even beyond the terrestrial consciousness. The Buddha, as He stood on the threshhold of Nirvāṇa, of the Non-Being, His soul turned back and took the Vow never to make the irrevocable crossing so long as there was a single being upon earth undelivered from the knot of suffering, from the bondage of the ego. (The text of the Buddhacharita abruptly stops with XIV. 36 and it is not clear to us if the Sage refers to a tradition translated into Hindi by Suryanarayana Choudhari - Benares Edition XIV 90 - उस समय जैसे स्वर्ग में किसी को क्रोध न हो, कोई बीमार न हो, किसी ने पाप मार्ग का आश्रय न ले लिया था।)

Ideas such as these present us in a nutshell the conception of the synthesis, by dedication - दृष्टादृष्टिन समन्वय - of human effort with destiny according to the Sage of Pondicherri. (Even here it is interesting to note how Bengal had to lay aside her claim to this Messenger of the Timeless). The sage reproduces faithfully the views of our Smriti Kāras like Yājnavalkya. Kalidasa also sponsors such views as will be clear from our analysis of his works. Our Shastrakaras refer to fate as Adrishta or the unseen and both Kalidasa and the Maharshi adopt this name. To quote Aurobindo again: Fate is Adrishta or the unseen thing which Spirit holds hidden in the plan of its vision, the consequence concealed from its travailing mind absorbed by the curtained nearness or the far invisible reaches of Time. Fate is Niyati, willed and executed by Prakriti. Problem of Rebirth p. 109. Yājnavalkya picturesquely describes destiny and human effort as two wheels of the same chariot:

यथा ह्येकेन न रथस्य गतिर्भवेत्।
एवं पुरुषकारेण विना दैवं न सिध्यति॥

implying that the cart cannot move with only one wheel. If one of the two, destiny distinctly obstructs human effort will certainly end in failure, दैवे निरुद्धति निवर्त्यन्ते विहाय हन्त प्रयासपरुषाणि न पौरुषाणि.

Not being able to see the Adrishta as its very name implies, we cannot assign any reason - नालक्षिते दैवकृतोऽन्न निषेदुषी पौरुषे । इत्यद्धा धीरसत्कवीरिव हृदयं विज्ञानपेक्षते ॥ as the poet Magha poetically conceives it. But Kalidasa tries to avoid depicting such adverse fate as far as possible, perhaps Kāma's flamboyant bragging in Kumāra III being one such context: कुर्यां हरस्यापि पिनाकपाणेः धैर्यच्युतिं कं मम धन्विनोऽन्ये. How he paid the penalty is too well known. Kalidasa gives us to understand that Destiny works itself out inexorably यात्येकतोऽस्तशिखरं पतिरोषधीनां, आविष्कृतोऽरुणपुरःसर एकतोऽर्कः । तेजोद्वयस्य युगपद्व्यसनोदयाभ्यां लोको नियम्यत इवात्मदशान्तरेषु ॥ why the sun should rise and why the moon should set युगपत् or at the same time - we cannot fathom. (In the context in the beginning of the fourth act of the Shakuntala, the morning when the sage Kanva returned from his pilgrimage happens to be a Purnimā, or full moon, when the setting moon and the rising sun almost synchronise. Though Kanva knew this fact well enough, destiny seems to have blinded him to the fact that the coming morning, on which he sends his fond daughter to her husband's palace, was an inauspicious Pratipat.)

To continue our trend about the sloka of Kalidasa, the Lord of the Oshadhis - herbs reviving even dead Laxmana to life in the Ramayana war - has to go to the setting mount while the sun with his legless Aruna, whom he has himself to lift up and make him sit on the yoke of the chariot as his charioteer, comes up to his zenith of power in the sky - these two luminaries, rising and setting simultaneously, as though by some mysterious design, determine the movement of the world, regulating it as it were, on critical situations.

Another poet Magha puts the idea giving more examples: कुमुद्वन्मपि श्रीमयं ओजषण्डं, त्यजति मुदमुलूकः प्रीतिमांश्चक्रवाकः । उदयमहिमरश्मेर्याति शीतांशुरस्तं, हतविधिलसितानां हीदृशीरेव पाकः ॥ The blue lotuses fade, the day lotuses shine in all splendour, the owl's delight is departed, the chakravaka is happy with its mate, the sun rises up, the moon plods on its weary way to set, the fate of those struck by misfortune is mysterious!

There seems to be again some dramatic purpose in the insertion of this sloka in the beginning of Act IV: the union of the flesh of the hero and heroine in Act III is more or less like Eve's tasting of the fruit of the forbidden tree in Paradise; but their real union, according to Tagore, takes place in Act VII through their son, with the blessing of the Divine Parents!

makes itself visible to Dushyanta; in Act VII. Sakuntala is spending her sorrowful time listening every day to some stirring and uplifting discourse about chastity. Dushyanta is purposely sent to the earth by this new route so that he may meet his son and through her his wife also. He pertinently asks the sage why he forgot everything and the answer, the curse of Durvāsas, is a satisfying answer. The end of Act VI makes all this quite clear - एवं विधातारः प्रसीदन्ति and सौदामिनी quits the stage saying सतिवत्सु दीपे व्यवधानदोषेण एष अन्धकारः पद्यते - She clearly says that Dushyanta's son is growing up though he is not able to see him. The gods have already arranged that Dushyanta will soon be happy.

Of course, there is malevolent destiny which exercises evil influences on us, but Kalidasa tries to push it on to the stage only so far as it is absolutely necessary to work out its evil designs. Durvasas' voice alone is heard on the stage shouting out his dreadful curse (Dean Inge remarks that nothing great enters into our lives without a curse). Kalidasa cleverly arranges that he goes out soon, but the maids have rushed to him, making him relent into limiting the duration of the curse. But he has already done his havoc. Mysterious are the ways of destiny and justifiable. Sakuntala's janmāntara sins (sins committed in her previous life) should have been responsible for her unconscious derelection of duty to the अतिथि whom the Sastras declare, one should worship as divinity. She had also thrown herself into the arms of Dushyanta without the expression of her father, who was both father and mother to her. The latter had gone to fan off Sanateertha only for her sake, else might suggest Sakuntala would not have lost much if she had just persuaded Dushyanta to stay on till father returned. In the impulse of the moment she had sinned, but we do feel that the punishment accorded was rather serious.

Nature, referred to as वन or तपोवन in Kalidasa's works, is quite ready to come to her rescue, sympathising with her fully: उद्गलितदर्भकवला मृग्यः परित्यक्तनर्तना मयूराः। अपसृतपाण्डुपत्रा मुञ्चन्त्यश्रूणीव लताः॥

What Ruskin might call Pathetic fallacy (unable to fathom the depths to which our Shastrakaras go, investing divine bodies to every tree and other forest-denizens), the leaves withered and fell of their own accord and Nature herself wept at her departure. She had wakened them and would not

The sage concludes his Problem of Rebirth: It is the Divine birth of the Spiritual self exceeding its supreme reward which is the highest gain to the external ignorance into divine selfknowledge.

This 'unseen Adrishta' is responsible for and moulds our destiny almost at every stage. Our Shastrakaras (and following them both Aurobindo and Kalidasa) declare that it is never imperious to our human aspirations, being sympathetic and even finding it in our Pilgrim's Path. (The sage contrasts this with the Greeks who call it Fate or Doom or Necessity which is even hostile to us sometimes). We believe that Divine/Daiva always comes to our rescue at critical turns in our life. Of course, we are not in a position to understand her and when destiny interferes in our progress but it goes without saying that it does project itself into our lives somehow. God or Godlike sages cross our path and it is up to us to recognise them and act up to their advice. तत्र दैवं अभिव्यक्तं पौरुषं पौर्वदैहिकं - This daiva is after all, according to Yajnavalkya, our own action in our former bodies in an अभिव्यक्त or manifested shape. Therefore we can logically prove that man is the architect of his own fortune - कोऽयं गुरुत्वं विपरीततां वा स्वचेष्टितान्येव नरं नयन्ति. In the Shakuntala, if the heroine symbolises human effort, we might suggest that Destiny threw her into the protection of the benevolent sage Kanva (who may also represent a fraction of Shakuntala's अदृष्ट); of his own accord, he cherishes a more than maternal affection for this world forsaken child (both her parent leave her and abruptly depart). Such a Vishvamitra according to Kalidasa is विश्व अमित्र who forsaks both his wife and daughter, धर्मदारा परित्यागी, अभिपुत्री परित्यागी, a more heinous sinner than Dushyanta who forsakes his धर्मदारा: only, the maid of भरत in Act VII declaring कदास्य धर्मदारा परित्यागिन: नाम संकीर्तयेत्. (The Vishvamitra is reformed when he teaches गायत्री the mantra for everybody's release later). This sage Kanva readily tries to counteract the evil influences of the malevolent planets presiding over Sakuntala's horoscope, going to Soma Teertha दैवमस्या: प्रतिकूलं शमयितुम्. Another aspect of the human effort a Purushakara is typified by Dushyanta who is purposely kept away from the sage Kanva. If for example, instead of the disciples escorting Shakuntala, Kanva himself had gone to Dushyanta, the latter's respect for the divine sage would have made him accept Sakuntala without protest as he has the greater respect towards him, calling him Bhagavan. (अयं भगवान् कोऽनुगृहीतायां कुलाङ्कुरो मारीचः). Destiny as typified in the namesake of Kanva, the sage Marīcha

have her morning coffee unless she had first watered them, remarking अस्ति समापि सोदरस्नेह एतेषु. Kanva gave them to understand that their sister would depart and the trees provided her with bridal garment and ornaments!

क्षौमं केनचिदिन्दु पाण्डु तरुणा माङ्गल्यमाविष्कृतं
निष्क्रान्तश्रवणोपभोगसुलभौ कौशेयसः केनचित्
अन्यैभो वनदेवताभि सकयैरापर्वभागोत्थितैः
दत्तान्याभरणानि तत्किसलयोद्भेदप्रतिद्वन्द्विभिः ॥

The same वनस्थदेवताः or presiding deities in the forest trees shed tears when they witnessed the misery of the पतिव्रता-

पश्यन्तीनां न खलु बहुशो न स्थलीदेवतानां
मुक्तास्थूलाः तरुकिसलयेष्वश्रुलेशाः पतन्ति ।

When Sita is abandoned by Laxman near Valmiki's Ashram. Similar is the weeping of the trees, peacocks and the deer:

नृत्तं मयूराः, कुसुमानि वृक्षाः, दर्भान्कुपात्रान्न जहुः हरिण्यः

तस्याः प्रपन्ने समदुःखभावं अत्यन्तमासीद्रुदितं वनेऽपि ॥

Even Rama[1], the Divine incarnation pretends as though he is human, sharing human tribulations when bereft of his wife in the forest. One thing, however, deserves to be pertinently noted, our Shurpanakhas, Manthras, and Durvasases, do not always obstruct our path in ordinary life; they ensnare us but in a trice as it were, and Kalidasa introduces them only for a brief spell, while English dramatists like Shakespeare make their villains stay on the stage till they perpetrate their worst crimes. Sanskrit dramatists leave more to an imagination. Thus Valmiki who makes his Manthara step up on the terrace यदुवंश

We conclude saying that both Kalidasa and the sage of Pondicherry are but two different sides of the coin viz the faithful representation of the views of our ancient Smṛti Kāras like Yajnavalkyamuni which are all ingrained in our minds at the present day. Aurobindo pertinently remarks:

Heaven's inner meanings steal through it
as through a veil,
Its inner light sustains this outer scene.

Savitri Book II. II.

① The Rama Epic showed he was too much lamentations: पतिव्रता जनकनन्दिनी गावो वत्सान्न पाययन्. The same Epic paints Nature as rejoicing at Rama's coronation: पुष्पाः फलानि कानने. Kalidasa makes the chamari deer wave their tails unbidden, before Himalaya. Kumar. 1.3

The Mahābhārata Tātparya Nirnaya of Sri Madhva (XXI 8)
summarises this idea thus:

निजानुभावार्जितो हरेरनुग्रहोऽञ्जितो
महाप्रयत्नार्जितो जनो न जग्मुरुन्नतिम् ॥

Sri Kapali sastri in his Lights on the Vedas refers to Madhva in felicitous terms thus: "The tradition that the Vedic hymns are supremely spiritual in their import was recovered by Anandatirtha, the Dvaita teacher Madhva. This shows clearly that there was, even before Sāyaṇa, a school of Vedic interpreters holding that though ritual worship was part of Vedic religion, and as such the mantras presented an aspect favourable to it, the inner meaning of the mantras was spiritual and the highest aim and use of the veda was God-knowledge, and attainment of the supreme end of life possible for man. Madhvacharya's work (Rig Bhāshya is comparatively small in volume (only about 75 pages in print), the language simple, but its influence among scholars is not commensurate with its importance, as can be judged from the fact that most modern scholars and Pandits as a class, with the possible exception of some among his followers are unaware of the existence of such a work. Let me conclude with the famous Bharata Kika

तर्कैः अप्रतिष्ठः श्रुतयो विभिन्ना नैको मुनिर्यस्य वचः प्रमाणम्
धर्मस्य तत्त्वं निहितं गुहायां महाजनो येन गतः स पन्थाः

I can boldly assert that our great Acharyas like Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva and our modern interpreters of these Acharyas like Aurobindo are the Mahājanas whose interpretations we can rely on.

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